

**73-5-15. Groundwater management plan.**

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Critical management area" means a groundwater basin in which the groundwater withdrawals consistently exceed the safe yield.

(b) "Safe yield" means the amount of groundwater that can be withdrawn from a groundwater basin over a period of time without exceeding the long-term recharge of the basin or unreasonably affecting the basin's physical and chemical integrity.

(2) (a) The state engineer may regulate groundwater withdrawals within a specific groundwater basin by adopting a groundwater management plan in accordance with this section for any groundwater basin or aquifer or combination of hydrologically connected groundwater basins or aquifers.

(b) The objectives of a groundwater management plan are to:

- (i) limit groundwater withdrawals to safe yield;
- (ii) protect the physical integrity of the aquifer; and
- (iii) protect water quality.

(c) The state engineer shall adopt a groundwater management plan for a groundwater basin if more than one-third of the water right owners in the groundwater basin request that the state engineer adopt a groundwater management plan.

(3) (a) In developing a groundwater management plan, the state engineer may consider:

- (i) the hydrology of the groundwater basin;
- (ii) the physical characteristics of the groundwater basin;
- (iii) the relationship between surface water and groundwater, including whether the groundwater should be managed in conjunction with hydrologically connected surface waters;
- (iv) the conjunctive management of water rights to facilitate and coordinate the lease, purchase, or voluntary use of water rights subject to the groundwater management plan;
- (v) the geographic spacing and location of groundwater withdrawals;
- (vi) water quality;
- (vii) local well interference; and
- (viii) other relevant factors.

(b) The state engineer shall base the provisions of a groundwater management plan on the principles of prior appropriation.

(c) (i) The state engineer shall use the best available scientific method to determine safe yield.

(ii) As hydrologic conditions change or additional information becomes available, safe yield determinations made by the state engineer may be revised by following the procedures listed in Subsection (5).

(4) (a) (i) Except as provided in Subsection (4)(b), the withdrawal of water from a groundwater basin shall be limited to the basin's safe yield.

(ii) Before limiting withdrawals in a groundwater basin to safe yield, the state engineer shall:

- (A) determine the groundwater basin's safe yield; and
  - (B) adopt a groundwater management plan for the groundwater basin.
- (iii) If the state engineer determines that groundwater withdrawals in a

groundwater basin exceed the safe yield, the state engineer shall regulate groundwater rights in that groundwater basin based on the priority date of the water rights under the groundwater management plan, unless a voluntary arrangement exists under Subsection (4)(c) that requires a different distribution.

(iv) A groundwater management plan shall include a list of each groundwater right in the proposed groundwater management area known to the state engineer identifying the water right holder, the land to which the groundwater right is appurtenant, and any identification number the state engineer uses in the administration of water rights.

(b) When adopting a groundwater management plan for a critical management area, the state engineer shall, based on economic and other impacts to an individual water user or a local community caused by the implementation of safe yield limits on withdrawals, allow gradual implementation of the groundwater management plan.

(c) (i) In consultation with the state engineer, water users in a groundwater basin may agree to participate in a voluntary arrangement for managing withdrawals at any time, either before or after a determination that groundwater withdrawals exceed the groundwater basin's safe yield.

(ii) A voluntary arrangement under Subsection (4)(c)(i) shall be consistent with other law.

(iii) The adoption of a voluntary arrangement under this Subsection (4)(c) by less than all of the water users in a groundwater basin does not affect the rights of water users who do not agree to the voluntary arrangement.

(5) To adopt a groundwater management plan, the state engineer shall:

(a) give notice as specified in Subsection (7) at least 30 days before the first public meeting held in accordance with Subsection (5)(b):

(i) that the state engineer proposes to adopt a groundwater management plan;

(ii) describing generally the land area proposed to be included in the groundwater management plan; and

(iii) stating the location, date, and time of each public meeting to be held in accordance with Subsection (5)(b);

(b) hold one or more public meetings in the geographic area proposed to be included within the groundwater management plan to:

(i) address the need for a groundwater management plan;

(ii) present any data, studies, or reports that the state engineer intends to consider in preparing the groundwater management plan;

(iii) address safe yield and any other subject that may be included in the groundwater management plan;

(iv) outline the estimated administrative costs, if any, that groundwater users are likely to incur if the plan is adopted; and

(v) receive any public comments and other information presented at the public meeting, including comments from any of the entities listed in Subsection (7)(a)(iii);

(c) receive and consider written comments concerning the proposed groundwater management plan from any person for a period determined by the state engineer of not less than 60 days after the day on which the notice required by Subsection (5)(a) is given;

(d) (i) at least 60 days prior to final adoption of the groundwater management

plan, publish notice:

- (A) that a draft of the groundwater management plan has been proposed; and
  - (B) specifying where a copy of the draft plan may be reviewed; and
  - (ii) promptly provide a copy of the draft plan in printed or electronic form to each of the entities listed in Subsection (7)(a)(iii) that makes written request for a copy; and
  - (e) provide notice of the adoption of the groundwater management plan.
- (6) A groundwater management plan shall become effective on the date notice of adoption is completed under Subsection (7), or on a later date if specified in the plan.
- (7) (a) A notice required by this section shall be:
- (i) published:
    - (A) once a week for two successive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in each county that encompasses a portion of the land area proposed to be included within the groundwater management plan; and
    - (B) in accordance with Section 45-1-101 for two weeks;
  - (ii) published conspicuously on the state engineer's website; and
  - (iii) mailed to each of the following that has within its boundaries a portion of the land area to be included within the proposed groundwater management plan:
    - (A) county;
    - (B) incorporated city or town;
    - (C) a local district created to acquire or assess a groundwater right under Title 17B, Chapter 1, Provisions Applicable to All Local Districts;
    - (D) improvement district under Title 17B, Chapter 2a, Part 4, Improvement District Act;
    - (E) service area, under Title 17B, Chapter 2a, Part 9, Service Area Act;
    - (F) drainage district, under Title 17B, Chapter 2a, Part 2, Drainage District Act;
    - (G) irrigation district, under Title 17B, Chapter 2a, Part 5, Irrigation District Act;
    - (H) metropolitan water district, under Title 17B, Chapter 2a, Part 6, Metropolitan Water District Act;
    - (I) special service district providing water, sewer, drainage, or flood control services, under Title 17D, Chapter 1, Special Service District Act;
    - (J) water conservancy district, under Title 17B, Chapter 2a, Part 10, Water Conservancy District Act; and
    - (K) conservation district, under Title 17D, Chapter 3, Conservation District Act.
- (b) A notice required by this section is effective upon substantial compliance with Subsections (7)(a)(i) through (iii).
- (8) A groundwater management plan may be amended in the same manner as a groundwater management plan may be adopted under this section.
- (9) The existence of a groundwater management plan does not preclude any otherwise eligible person from filing any application or challenging any decision made by the state engineer within the affected groundwater basin.
- (10) (a) A person aggrieved by a groundwater management plan may challenge any aspect of the groundwater management plan by filing a complaint within 60 days after the adoption of the groundwater management plan in the district court for any county in which the groundwater basin is found.
- (b) Notwithstanding Subsection (9), a person may challenge the components of a groundwater management plan only in the manner provided by Subsection (10)(a).

(c) An action brought under this Subsection (10) is reviewed de novo by the district court.

(d) A person challenging a groundwater management plan under this Subsection (10) shall join the state engineer as a defendant in the action challenging the groundwater management plan.

(e) (i) Within 30 days after the day on which a person files an action challenging any aspect of a groundwater management plan under Subsection (10)(a), the person filing the action shall publish notice of the action:

(A) in a newspaper of general circulation in the county in which the district court is located; and

(B) in accordance with Section 45-1-101 for two weeks.

(ii) The notice required by Subsection (10)(e)(i)(A) shall be published once a week for two consecutive weeks.

(iii) The notice required by Subsection (10)(e)(i) shall:

(A) identify the groundwater management plan the person is challenging;

(B) identify the case number assigned by the district court;

(C) state that a person affected by the groundwater management plan may petition the district court to intervene in the action challenging the groundwater management plan; and

(D) list the address for the clerk of the district court in which the action is filed.

(iv) (A) Any person affected by the groundwater management plan may petition to intervene in the action within 60 days after the day on which notice is last published under Subsections (10)(e)(i) and (ii).

(B) The district court's treatment of a petition to intervene under this Subsection (10)(e)(iv) is governed by the Utah Rules of Civil Procedure.

(v) A district court in which an action is brought under Subsection (10)(a) shall consolidate all actions brought under that subsection and include in the consolidated action any person whose petition to intervene is granted.

(11) A groundwater management plan adopted or amended in accordance with this section is exempt from the requirements in Title 63G, Chapter 3, Utah Administrative Rulemaking Act.

(12) (a) Recharge and recovery projects permitted under Chapter 3b, Groundwater Recharge and Recovery Act, are exempted from this section.

(b) In a critical management area, the artificial recharge of a groundwater basin that uses surface water naturally tributary to the groundwater basin by a local district created under Subsection 17B-1-202(1)(a)(xiii), in accordance with Chapter 3b, Groundwater Recharge and Recovery Act, constitutes a beneficial use of the water under Section 73-1-3 if:

(i) the recharge is done during the time the area is designated as a critical management area;

(ii) the recharge is done with a valid recharge permit;

(iii) the recharged water is not recovered under a recovery permit; and

(iv) the recharged water is used to replenish the groundwater basin.

(13) Nothing in this section may be interpreted to require the development, implementation, or consideration of a groundwater management plan as a prerequisite or condition to the exercise of the state engineer's enforcement powers under other law,

including powers granted under Section 73-2-25.

(14) A groundwater management plan adopted in accordance with this section may not apply to the dewatering of a mine.

(15) (a) A groundwater management plan adopted by the state engineer before May 1, 2006, remains in force and has the same legal effect as it had on the day on which it was adopted by the state engineer.

(b) If a groundwater management plan that existed before May 1, 2006, is amended on or after May 1, 2006, the amendment is subject to this section's provisions.

Amended by Chapter 97, 2012 General Session